

# HUNTINGDON BEAUMONT

COAL MINING AND RAILWAY ENTREPRENEUR  
c. 1560 - 1624

*“Some south gentlemen have upon great hope of benefit come into this country to hazard their monies in coal pits. Master Beaumont, a gentleman of great ingenuity and rare parts, adventured into our mines with his thirty thousand pounds; who brought with him many rare engines not known in these parts; as the art to bore with iron rods to try the deepness and thickness of the coal; rare engines to draw water out of the pits; wagons with one horse to carry down coals from the pits to the staiths at the river, &c. Within a few years he consumed all his money and rode home upon his light horse.”...*

A REFERENCE TO BLYTHE IN THE NORTH EAST

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - June 2020

## **CONTENTS**

**Part 1 – Page 3**  
**INTRODUCTION**

**Part 2 – Page 5**  
**HUNTINGDON BEAUMONTS COAL MINING ACTIVITIES**

**Part 3 – Page 10**  
**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**

## **SOME RESEARCH SOURCES**

**“A History of Coal Mining in Coleorton and the Locality” by Samuel T Stewart**

**“The Evolution of Coleorton” by Samuel T Stewart**

**The Leicestershire & South Derbyshire Coal Fields 1200-1900 by Colin Owen**

**A History of Coal Mining in Great Britain by Robert Lindsay Galloway 1882**

**Nottingham Hidden History Team – Internet postings**

**Beamish Transport Online**

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## PART 1

### INTRODUCTION

Huntingdon Beaumont was born c.1560 in Coleorton, Leicestershire and died destitute in Nottingham Gaol in 1624. His parents were Sir Nicholas (1528-1585) and Anne Beaumont (nee Saunders).

Huntingdon was the youngest of four sons born to the couple. His elder brother, who succeeded to the estate, was Sir Henry Beaumont who married Elizabeth Lovis at Breedon on the Hill on 11<sup>th</sup> Jan 1571. Sir Nicholas was Lord of the manors of Overton Saucy and Overton Quatramars from 1538 to 1585 which were part of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Coleorton.

<b>BEAUMONT FAMILY COLEORTON LINE 1426 - 1948</b>			
<b>LORDSHIP OF THE MANOR</b>	<b>SUCCESSOR TO TITLE</b>	<b>LIFE SPAN</b>	<b>RELATION</b>
1426 - 1457	SIR THOMAS BEAUMONT	-1457	-
1457 - 1461	SIR JOHN BEAUMONT	-1461	SON
1485 - 1531	SIR JOHN BEAUMONT	1446 - 1531	SON
1531 - 1538	RICHARD BEAUMONT	-1538	GT NEPHEW
1538 - 1585	NICHOLAS BEAUMONT	1528 - 1585	SON
1585 - 1607	SIR HENRY BEAUMONT	-1607	SON

#### **The Coleorton Beaumonts' line up to Sir Henry**

Before the dawn of the Elizabethan age there was throughout the region an ever increasing demand for coal for both domestic and industrial use, and the Beaumonts' were well placed to take advantage of this as they owned significant coal bearing lands.

It was not however until Nicholas Beaumont became of age in 1549 having succeeded to his father's Richard Beaumont's estates at the age of ten in 1538, that the Beaumont's developed a serious interest in coal mining. Not only did he develop coal pits on his own estate but turned his attention to Newbold Moor, an area to the north of Coleorton, part of which was owned by the Duchy of Lancaster. Due to various problems resulting in law suits, the Beaumonts were forced into a partnership with the Willoughbys' of Wollaton who had become involved in large-scale coal mining on their Nottinghamshire estates.

By Elizabethan standards, the Coleorton Beaumonts' residing in a manor house there, would have been seen as an aristocratic family in the English East Midlands, and would have been of gentleman status in the formal Elizabethan sense. There follows descriptions of the Beaumont's

manor house in 1538 and 1607. Manor houses of the Tudor period varied significantly from very large and elaborate properties, to much more modest properties depending on the wealth held by the lord of the manor.

The will of **Richard Beaumont**, who died in 1538, lists the inventory of particular rooms in his manor house. The rooms included are:-

*Two bedrooms – the Red Chamber and the Green Chamber, one of which was over the hall. The parlour and the kitchen are also referred to. This would suggest a modest manor house, which had at least five main rooms, which at the time of the will were either empty or were occupied by other members of the family.*

**Nicholas Beaumont's son and heir, Sir Henry Beaumont was lord of the manor from 1585 to 1607** and in an inquisition of his estate, on his death in 1607, the manor house described is significantly grander than the house that had been described earlier in 1538 and 1573, suggesting either a re-build, or significant additions had taken place between these two dates. The 1607 hall is described as being of stud and plaster, and rough cast brick construction. The house included a "best dining chamber, rooms under the hall, bed chambers and dressing rooms, cellars and sollers (lofts?)", with probably other rooms on an upper floor. Outside, there was an inner courtyard with a communal well, and houses on the east and west sides enclosed "towards the street with a stone wall". Old farm buildings ran down towards the highway, next to the manse was a two story stable, and next to that a barn with its own yard. Also associated with the main building were the Brew House, Dairy House, Chambers, and Malt House. New building work had been going on, since reference is made to "the new building of freestone". Adjacent to the manor buildings were the closes, or enclosed fields, called Netherfield, Cawbeck and the Carre, each with coalmines in them. Coalmines were also mentioned in Gelsmoor and the Outwoods.

## PART 2

### HUNTINGDON BEAUMONT'S COAL MINING ACTIVITIES

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, it was Huntingdon Beaumont who became the main driving force behind the Beaumont family's coal mining activities.

The young Huntingdon Beaumont's upbringing in the coal industry clearly had a major impact on him and he would later go on to make his own way in the coal mining industry, being said by many to have been the most famous mining innovator of the Elizabethan period.

Huntingdon not only worked the Beaumont's Coleorton mines, but in partnership with his brother Thomas opened mines at nearby Bedworth (Warwickshire) in 1597 and Measham 1611. Neither of these enterprises proved to be a real success, and by the 1620's the family had become financially insolvent, despite the fact that their Coleorton mine was in profit. Huntingdon Beaumont's lack of business acumen no doubt had an influence on this.

Huntingdon would undoubtedly have been well educated and have had access to a good library of books. The Germans were well in advance of the British in the use of mechanisation in coal mining and it is highly likely that somewhere in the collection would have been a copy of "*De re Metallica*" (an early German mining text book) by *Georgius Agricola* 1556 which contained numerous wood-cut illustrations of methods employed in German coal mines as shown in the following illustrations from the book. This could well have been the catalyst for Huntingdon's entrepreneurial career in the coal mining industry.



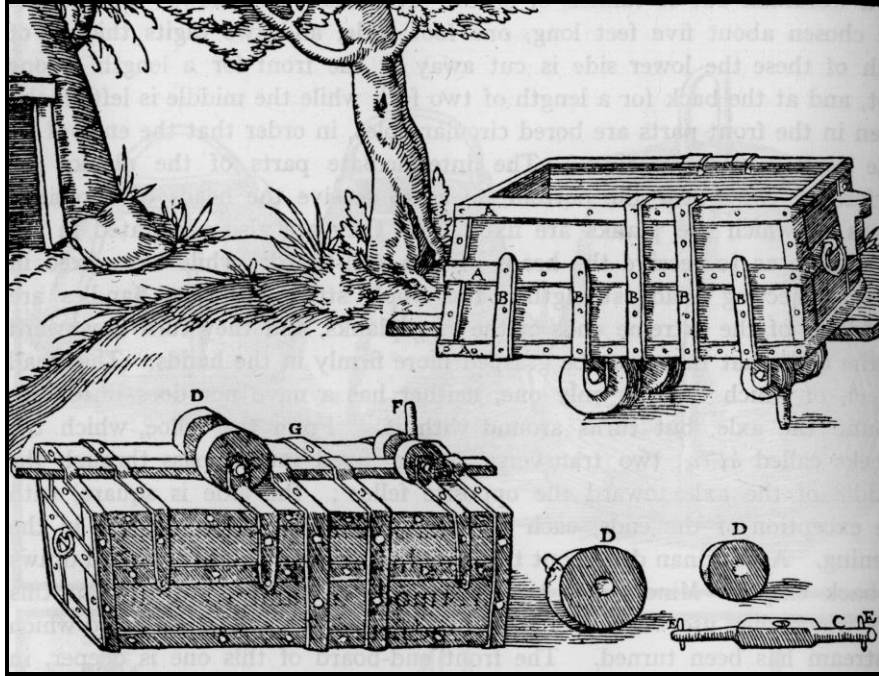
A 'Rag and Chain Pump' used to pump water from the pit bottom. Rags are attached to the continuously rotating chain at close intervals and scoop water up from the pit bottom as they pass around the return drum. They pass up through a pipe and the water is discharged at the top into the drain. Circular metal plates replaced the rags in a further development.



Ventilating a mine using bellows



Timber lined shaft mining showing underground wagons running on rails



A German truck pre 1556. These used the “hund” system with unflanged wheels running on wooden planks and a vertical pin on the truck fitting into the gap between the planks, to keep it going the right way. These were used underground in the mines.

## ACTIVITIES IN THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COAL FIELDS

By 1601, Huntingdon Beaumont, now around 41 years of age, had turned his attention from Warwickshire to the Nottinghamshire area where his talents as a mining entrepreneur, but not as a businessman were in evidence once again. In October 1601, April 1602, July 1602 and October 1603, Huntingdon signed leases with Sir Percival Willoughby to mine coal in Wollaton at Crow Wood, Bretlawne and in Strelley.

At Wollaton and Strelley he was able to employ his fascination with new mining techniques by introducing for example, boring rods to identify coal seam depths and thicknesses, and horse driven pumping systems. **However, his most recognized project was the development of Britain’s first ever overland railway system employing horse drawn wooden wheeled waggons running on wooden rails.** It is recorded that Huntingdon employed a form of flanged wooden wheel on his waggons to prevent them veering off the track, but unfortunately that cannot be further verified although this is highly plausible. It is likely that wooden rails would have been fastened down, end to end, on logs of wood, placed crosswise at intervals of say two or three feet using oak pegs. These are now commonly known as sleepers. In basic terms, a railway or waggonway is a system that uses two parallel rails on which waggons with external flanged wheels run in order to prevent the waggons veering off the rails.

A line was constructed approximately two miles long from Wollaton to Strelley. Work on laying the track started in October 1603 and was completed exactly one year later, at the cost of around £166. The waggonway was built to carry coal from the Strelley Pits to a distribution point near Wollaton Lane (now Wollaton Road). Most of the coal was then taken onwards by road to the river Trent at Trent Bridge to be loaded onto barges.

In 1603, the following statement was issued by Lord Willoughby (taken from "The Nottingham Hidden History Team" posted Sept 12<sup>th</sup> 2012):- *"News has reached me of Master Beaumont's efforts to move coal from Strelley to Wollaton Pits. His new invention will carry coal with waggons, with small wheels made from a single slice of oak, running on wooden rayles. I return home enlightened by this insight and possible cure for heavy loads our roads are yet in unmade condition"*.

Huntingdon Beaumont's idea for the railway could well have come from the *German mining text book "De re Metallica" by Georgius Agricola 1556*. An illustration of a wooden truck / waggon and rails with a wooden guide peg on the truck axle is shown on page 7.

The transition from a horse-drawn waggonway to a fully steam-powered railway was a gradual evolution. The first recorded use of steam power on a railway was in 1804, but the initial run was found to be more expensive than horses. In 1825, George Stephenson's Stockton and Darlington railway was completed and on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September the same year, between 450 and 600 people sitting in empty waggons meant for transporting coal left the small Heighington railway station at the town of Newton Aycliffe, becoming the first passengers of the world's first steam-powered train on a public railway. **This was 220 years after Huntingdon Beaumont built the world's first true overland horse drawn railway / waggonway.**

In 1605, having once again failed financially with many of his grandiose schemes in Nottinghamshire, Huntingdon Beaumont turned his attention to the North East, but after losing a considerable sum of money there also, he returned to Nottinghamshire to try and revive his mining activities at Wollaton and Strelley in a bid to appease his creditors.

By 1615, complaints were made that Beaumont was overworking the pits. Beaumont was gaining little profit from his venture and he wrote to Sir Percival Willoughby, who had inherited Sir Francis's estate after his death.....*"this year will prove worse by £1,000 than ever mortal man could have imagined. In respect of the unreasonable weather which has greatly diminished our sale and much increased our charge. I most truly say that it poureth down on me; I fear the very drowning of me* (The "Nottingham Hidden History Team").

Dr. Colin Owen comments in his respected book that..... *"the suggestion has been made that the Wollaton and Strelley pits, under the direction of Huntingdon Beaumont, may have been the most technically advanced in the country and it seems reasonable to suggest that similar methods and equipment were in use at Coleorton, Measham and Bedworth"*.



## HUNTINGDON BEAUMONT'S BORING ROD DEVELOPMENTS

Huntingdon pioneered the search for coal by boring into the strata. This idea took some time to spread to other areas, having been first introduced into Wollaton.

The boring rods, described as a great ager (auger) and a little ager (auger) were employed to find the depth and thickness of a coal seam, but it was clearly a long and painful process.

Wrought iron rods that could be joined to one another were fixed in a wooden beam supported and pivoted on a wooden tripod. This was bounced onto the ground in order to break through the strata, and at each stroke the rod was rotated a quarter of a turn by the operator. The boring rod had a chisel end which required constant sharpening. As the rod was withdrawn from the hole bits of the strata came up with it and these were examined in a wimble to identify the various strata which the rod passed through.

## ACTIVITIES IN THE NORTH EAST COAL FIELD

Around 1605, and following his failure to make a success of his coal mining activities in Nottinghamshire, Huntingdon Beaumont moved to the North East, near Blythe in Northumberland to try his luck there, leaving considerable debts in his wake in Nottinghamshire.

In a book entitled "A History of Coal Mining in Great Britain" by Robert Lindsay Galloway published in 1882, the following is written.....*The improvements introduced into coal mining at this time (refers to the early 1600's) were due to a considerable extent to adventurers, who were attracted into the coal trade by the increased importance now attaching to it, and by the advance in the value of coal. Among those, a gentleman named Beamont or Beaumont makes a prominent figure, many new and ingenious contrivances being introduced by him into the Newcastle-on-Tyne district (near Blythe in Northumberland). The earliest historian of Newcastle, writing in 1649, refers to this matter in the following terms... "Some south gentlemen have upon great hope of benefit come into this country (i.e. district) to hazard their monies in coal pits. Master Beaumont, a gentleman of great ingenuity and rare parts, adventured into our mines with his thirty thousand pounds; who brought with him many rare engines not known in these parts; as the art to bore with iron rods to try the deepness and thickness of the coal; rare engines to draw water out of the pits; wagons with one horse to carry down coals from the pits to the staiths at the river, &c. Within a few years he consumed all his money and rode home upon his light horse."*... Mr. Clephan, of Newcastle, also refers to a payment in the household books of Naworth Castle, for a set of boring rods bought at Newcastle in July 1618 by a Lord William Howard for £6 15s 9d.

Staiths were sheds at the river bank where valuable loaded horse drawn coal waggons could be kept under cover. On arrival at the staith the horse was unhitched, and then the waggon was pushed by the waggonman to a turntable inside the shed. The coal was teemed down the spout into the keel boat to be taken down river for transfer into sea-going collier ships. The empty waggon was pushed to another turntable to exit the shed and the horse was hitched for the return journey to the colliery.

**Huntingdon Beaumont's coal mining activities and developments in the early 1600s near Blythe in Northumberland, like most of his ventures, proved unprofitable. However, the technologies he implemented were employed later by others to significant effect.**

## THE JAILING AND DEATH OF HUNTINGDON BEAUMONT

Regrettably, Huntingdon Beaumont was not a successful businessman. He cost several of his family member's considerable sums of money, and was eventually arrested for debt in Oct 1618. He was sent to Nottingham Gaol where he languished and died destitute in 1624.

### OBITUARY

Huntingdon Beaumont may have personally failed in the coal-winning business during his lifetime, but his vision of how to win and transport coal was in the long term proven to have been correct. **Despite his failings, his legacy lived on, and his invention went on to influence great engineers like Isambard Kingdom Brunel and George Stephenson.**

### PART 3

### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION



**EXCAVATION OF THE WILLINGTON WOODEN WAGGONWAY IN 2013.  
THIS WAS CONSTRUCTED IN 1795 TO CARRY COAL  
FROM TYNESIDE MINES TO THE RIVER**

The author is struck by how little progress had been made in the development of wagonways from those constructed by Huntingdon Beaumont almost 200 years previously.